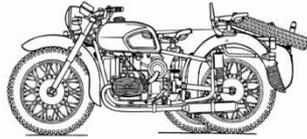


The Great



Sidecar Expedition

On 3 May 2011 twenty riders set off from Bila Tserkva in the Ukraine to travel through Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Albania, Montenegro, Croatia and Italy on restored Ukrainian Dnpr MB650 motorbikes and sidecars. The bikes were 1940's era twin cylinder BMW style machines and had been restored over the preceding twelve months to approximate original condition complete with ammunition boxes and jerricans on the sidecars.



My Dnepr MB 650

Each machine had been purchased by the rider and special three month transit Ukrainian registration as well as "green card" insurance had been arranged to facilitate border crossings. Having only one rider per machine meant the space in the sidecar could be used to carry spares, tent, sleeping bag and other personal items. Accommodation during the trip was a mixture of budget hotels and camping. Main roads were avoided and the group didn't "in convoy".

The trip was organised by Lang Kidby of Brisbane, Queensland, who, together with wife, Bev, has been responsible for a large number of high profile adventures including rebuilding and flying a WW1 Vickers Vimy bomber from the UK to Australia, the Peking to Paris car rally and the re-enactment of Bert Hinkler's historic flight from London to Adelaide. (See www.next-horizon.org)

The original route from Turkey through Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel with the bikes being shipped home from Haifa was abandoned because of the unrest in the Middle East – particularly in Syria. From Turkey we headed west through the Balkans to Italy with the bikes being shipped out of Genoa.

The Reconnaissance Run 2010



John Salter



Lang Kidby



Sasha and Nadia

In June 2010, Lang Kidby, and John Salter (both of whom I went to high school with 50 years ago!) set off on a trial run on restored Dnpr MB650 motorbikes and sidecars together with Sasha, the mechanic, and his wife, Nadia. Travelling through the Ukraine for a week, they covered 1500 km on the machines and at the end of the trial gave the green light to Sasha to acquire another 18 machines for the rest of us. The machines were acquired from various sources including the military and were stripped down, reconditioned, modified and repainted in the colour of our choice.



Bikes before restoration

On the road at last!



The author - ready to roll!



Roadside repairs (a familiar sight)



Negotiating oil supplies with the locals



Ukraine monastery near Levitch

Numerous breakdowns along the way tested the mechanical skills of riders and the resources of the backup crew. Driving a fully laden Dnpr motorbike and left-mounted sidecar wasn't as difficult as I imagined - except for downhill turns to the right where the machine would prefer to go straight. Most of us ended up on the wrong side of the road before we mastered this skill! We arrived at Kamjanets Podilsky in Southern Ukraine on 5 May and moved on to Chernivtsi, our last city in the Ukraine on the following day.



The Romanian Orthodox church at Falticeni



Just arrived at Nesebar, Bulgaria

Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey

The group arrived in Istanbul on 15 May after riding through Romania and Bulgaria during the preceding week. Thirty-five hours were spent at the Ukraine/Romania border crossing as a result of Ukrainian obfuscation. I got through to the Romanian side of the border at 2.30 am and rode through the dark and the rain to a small hotel where I couldn't wake the owner. Cold, wet and tired, I camped on the front step until a few more bikes arrived an hour and a half later making so much noise that the owner was eventually roused. He was such a charming gentleman - didn't mind getting woken up in the early hours of the morning and in fact opened the bar at 4.00 am!

Romania was just wonderful! Beautiful countryside, friendly helpful people, good food and cheap prices. The Romanians are the stand-out people on the trip - courteous, welcoming and go out of their way to help you. Bulgaria was also interesting and the historic town of Nesebar was well worth visiting. We stayed in a luxury hotel right on the beach and were permitted the luxury of two nights there.



The bike on the ferry across the Danube in Romania



John and Jim on arrival Nesebar, Bulgaria



Byzantine church at Nesebar



Nesebar street/quay scene

Problems with the bikes persisted. Lang's bike was towed by his wife in the little 1200cc support van for two days and on one occasion, Bev towed two bikes behind the van for most of the day - a highly stressful experience for tower and towee(s). My bike generally ran well coming over the mountains in Bulgaria to the Turkish border but the road was so rough that the left-hand fork bolt lost its nut and I managed to strip the thread on the tappet cover holding stud. Both

problems were fixed using wire found on the side of the road. Other riders weren't so lucky and repairs were necessary before half the crew could proceed.

One night was spent at Kirklareni in Turkey after a long wait at the Turkish border (three hours) but not as long as the Ukrainian border (35 hours). The run into Istanbul was routine as Turkish roads were some of the best we experienced. Traffic in Istanbul was hectic of course (7 million people live there) and out hotel took some finding! Negotiating narrow streets and steep hills in the area around the hotel was difficult with the added risk of burning out a clutch should it be necessary to stop/start on a steep slope.

We enjoyed a full day's sightseeing in Istanbul and most of us took in the Blue Mosque, Haghia Sophia, Topkapi and the Grand Bazaar where I found a bolt to secure the left fork on the motorbike (not a very romantic purchase considering the fabulous range of carpets, artefacts and jewellery on sale in this interesting city but a very necessary one).



Graham Nugent and his motorbike - on the way to Istanbul



The Blue Mosque - fabulous piece of architecture



Interior of the Blue Mosque



Entrance to Topkapi Palace Museum

From Istanbul we took the ferry to Mudyana across the Marmara Sea from where it was a 200 km run to Cannakale. Two nights were spent by most of us at Cannakale to allow for yet more major repairs on the bikes- including mine. Both carburettors not delivering enough fuel, fuel cock starving the carburettors and oil leaking from the right hand tappet cover all over my boot (not a great problem - they looked very shiny at the end of the trip) and the brake pedal (major problem - it became very slippery). But I wasn't Robinson Crusoe! We've probably been lulled into a false sense of security over the last few days - thinking that we're on top of the problems with the bikes - but everyone was snapped back into reality by a series of major setbacks. That included the Lang's bike breaking down and being towed for the last 600 km!!

Gallipoli



Waiting to board the ferry at Istanbul. They loaded us last!



Camping at Kum



A common scene - fixing bikes

Most of the bike problems had been fixed by the time everyone made it to Kum on the Gallipoli Peninsula. We camped in a delightful camping ground on the beach just south of ANZAC Cove and most took advantage of another two day stopover to ride around Lone Pine, ANZAC Cove and Helles Point in perfect weather.

Thassos Island, Greece

Well, what a wonderful little piece of paradise Thassos was! We arrived by ferry from the Greek mainland and camped in another pleasant camping ground beside the sea at "Golden Beach" - fairly basic facilities but what a location! Huge mountains just rise out of the sea and form a backdrop to the azure blue Aegean.



Waiting for the ferry



On the (quite luxurious) ferry to Thassos
(Marcel, ?, Warwick, Jim)



The author at Thassos



Southern-most tip of Thassos, looking West



Southern -most tip of Thassos - Archangel Monastery perched on a cliff

Regrettably two of our group decided to pull out which brought our numbers down to 17 plus Bev in the support car. It happened on the run from Gallipoli to Alexandropolous in Greece when a series of mishaps with a couple of bikes was the straw that broke the camel's back.

One of the bikes has been cannibalised for parts and the other has been bequeathed to another rider who will store it here at a mechanic's workshop in Thassos and return for it sometime in the future.

After Thassos it was back to the Greek mainland via the Kavala ferry.

Weather was perfect most of the time in Turkey and Greece and we took advantage of our seaside location on Thassos to go for a swim.

At this stage the bike is going OK except for the weeping oil from the RH tappet cover. Periodically I transferred some spilled oil to my left boot to match up the shine.

Greece to Albania, Montenegro, Croatia



Bikes in their pyjamas, outside Hotel Logis in Florina, Greece



Albanian fishermen netting in Lake Ohrig, Pogradec
(A couple of hours work yielded an ice cream container full of sardines)

After the ferry to Kavala we headed to Thessalonika. Didn't see much of the city as we were in a hotel on the outskirts. At this stage yet another member of the group decided to "pull the pin" so we were down to 16 riders. We arrived next day at the pretty town of Florina in northern Greece, near the Albanian border. Florina seemed to be full of Melbourne Greeks! Good food and very friendly people!

There was an incredibly steep climb north of Florina but we were able to sample some spectacular alpine scenery as we crossed into Albania. Our destination was Pogradec on the shores of Lake Ohrid.

From Pogradec we descended through the mountains to the Albanian coast and spent a night at the port city of Durres. The most interesting thing about Durres is probably its Roman amphitheatre and King Zog's villa that he built in the 1920's. It's derelict now and closed to the public but by bribing the guard we got through the razor wire.



"Hub" leaving Pogradec, Lake Ohrid in the background.



Albanian countryside - after leaving Pogradec



The Roman amphitheatre at Durres, Albania



Mosaics at the Roman amphitheatre



King Zog's Villa



Brian in King Zog's Villa, Durres, Albania

From Durres, Albania, we rode to Tivan on the "Montenegro Riviera". The scenery and architecture changed dramatically once we crossed the border into Montenegro. What a beautiful country and such a contrast to Albania! Marcel and I decided to lash out and eat at a quality restaurant adjacent to our hotel and enjoyed first class Macedonian and Slovenian wines with our Adriatic seafood platter and Venison casserole. Quince brandy accompanied the coffee!



Private motor yachts at Tivan, Montenegro



John, Myles, Marcel and Dave - in front of our hotel



Our hotel at Tivan

It was a long ride of over 300 km from Tivan in Montenegro to Split in Croatia which involved three border crossings! (Montenegro/Croatia/Bosnia Herzegovina/Croatia). Scenery was spectacular the whole way and there was the bonus of a modern motorway on the final run into Split.



On the ferry in Montenegro. (It took 50 km off the drive.)



Dubrovnik with its fabulous bridge and port (We rode past it)



John and Myles admiring the bridge at Dubrovnik

Major breakdowns were still occurring with the bikes and diff changes, gearbox changes, head changes were a daily routine. My bike generally ran OK but it wouldn't idle and was hard to start when hot. This saw me holding up the queue at border crossings and toll booths when it cut out and I had to jump on the kick start. The toll booth attendant at Split helped me push the machine out of the way today to let all the other (impatient) traffic through.....

After nearly a month of riding without promised mechanical support, our Ukrainian mechanic, Sasha, and his wife, Nadia, finally joined us after being turned back at borders, having ferries cancelled, etc. Sasha then put in long night time hours doing major work on some bikes....

Rode past Dubrovnik on the way to Split and was impressed with the architecture (and the number of cruise ships in the harbour). Those who ventured in said the traffic was murder though...

Italy and Genoa



Jim at the statue of Croatian priest Frane Bulic who introduced the vernacular to the mass



The author in the old city inside Diocletian's palace, Split



The facade of Roman Emperor Diocletian's palace at Split

After Split we rode to Zadar in Croatia to take the ferry to Ancona in Italy. Our arrival in Split coincided with a Harley Davidson motorbike rally and about 5,000 Harleys from all over Europe (and overseas) congregated in Croatia. We shared the ferry with about a hundred of them! The strange thing about Split was the numerous bars/cafe's which served alcohol and coffee and the very few restaurants or other establishments that served food!



Planning the route - Lang and Bev at Split



Graham relaxing; Sasha on the job at Split



Sasha on the job again - fitting Marcel's new gearbox



Warwick, Stuart, Hub, Sasha and Dave at the Lada "workshop" van, Split

The ferry trip from Zadar to Ancona went off without a hitch. Most people managed to sleep on couches or chairs pushed together (no cabins available) and the galley served up an adequate dinner and breakfast. Flat seas meant no upset tummies.



Sidecars have more than one use - the author waiting to load at Zadar



Lined up with the Harley Davidson's at Zadar wharf



John and Marcel enjoying the cruise - about to arrive at Ancona



Different styles!

After arriving at Ancona we rode to Urbino, a beautiful town in the Tuscan highlands, where our campsite offered a fabulous view of the town. It's a university town now so there were plenty of young people about (to compensate for the influx of geriatric bike riders).



The campsite at Urbino



View of Urbino from the campsite



Typical Tuscan countryside en-route to Urbino

From Urbino it was another beautiful trip through the Tuscan mountain passes to Poppi, a small village in another fabulous location. The woman who ran the camping ground could not have been more helpful or friendly. More breakdowns with some of the bikes meant we spent a bonus second night there while Sasha's bike underwent an engine change and Sue's bike had a new differential fitted. Most other people explored the historic medieval castle in the town.



The neighbours at Poppi, Tuscany. Typical fine stonework used in house construction



Ivan contemplating the balustrade in the castle at Poppi



The bells in the castle tower, Poppi



Interesting sculpture in the castle garden. (We weren't far from the vast marble deposits at Carrara)



The delightful campsite at Poppi



The river at Poppi with the castle in the background

Pisa was the next destination and the campsite was just down the road from the famous leaning tower (which is probably the most exciting thing to see in Pisa). We all made the pilgrimage to the tower and took the obligatory pictures. Camping was pretty basic but there is usually a bit of interaction with other campers who want to know what the story is with our group of vintage sidecars.



The most interesting thing about Pisa



The second most interesting thing about Pisa

From Pisa to Lavento in the "Cinque Terre/ Riviera di Levante" the scenery was nothing short of spectacular. It was a test of bikes and riders to navigate the steep cliff climbs (and descents), curves, bends and switchbacks. Lavento is a small resort town on the coast and the camping ground was within walking distance of the beach. Marcel and I went "mountain climbing" to justify a tasty meal with a bottle of wine in a local hotel.



On the "Riviera di Levante", villages perched on cliffs and hilltops



The spectacular blue of the "Mare Ligure"/Gulf of Genoa



Terraced farms along the coast road to Lavento



Hillside farms near Lavento



The beach at Lavento



Marcel leading the mountain walk along a very dubious path

From Lavento to Genoa was a relatively easy run - most of it on the motorway, It's really a series of tunnels and viaducts and it seemed like we "tunnelled" all the way to Genoa which is an impressive city built on a series of hills and was a one-time rival to Venice.

On the night of our arrival we booked in to a local seafood restaurant for a final dinner together. It's great that most of our group made it here OK and enjoyed ourselves on the way - despite mechanical problems and other setbacks. Even on the last day the bikes played up and some riders waited at Lavento for a couple of hours before setting off so Sasha could fix the problems.

Bikes Cleaned and Packed - Heading for Home

Genoa is a great city! People are friendly, food is delicious; restaurants, cafes and bars abound and prices are reasonable. It has a long history and, amongst other things, is the home of Christopher Columbus, discoverer of the new world. It is home to one of the oldest banks in the world - Bank of St George - which was founded in 1407. The largest port in Italy, Genoa has fabulous architecture, numerous galleries cathedrals, palaces and museums. Well worth a few days visit on the next trip to Europe.



Genoa panorama - courtesy of Wikipedia

Almost a full day was spent washing the bikes, spares and gear at a local self-service car wash. All bikes have to be in pristine condition to satisfy Australian quarantine requirements with all traces of soil, plant material, dirt, grime, etc, removed. Things were going well and we nearly got all seventeen bikes cleaned up before the facility owner came along and went ballistic at the amount of oil, grease and other "material" going into his drains. The job was completed at a rival business down the road. (He did make a few bucks out of us though so it's hard to feel sorry for him.)



Robert about to insert yet more "gettoni's" into the high pressure cleaning machine



Warwick on the job with the high pressure hose



Myles kisses good-bye to his bike (Sold to John - or rather to his partner, Jan)

Weather was some of the worst we've had since the trip began - it bucketed with rain all day! So it was a long, cold, wet job and a cold wet wait for the shipping company to let us in to their secure storage facility at about 3.00 pm. But, by the end of the day all bikes were clean and locked up in the warehouse. Everyone looked forward to hot showers, hot food and something "sustaining" to drink.



Sparkling clean bikes on the waterfront at Genoa



Clean bikes - Graham in his transparent miniskirt

The next day we fronted up to the shipping company at 11.00 am to pack the bikes. Sue and Ivan's bikes were packed into a 20 foot container for New Zealand and the rest were loaded into two 40 footers for shipment to Brisbane. Spare wheels were taken off to allow the bikes to be loaded transversely across the container and with a bit of pushing and shoving all were made to fit in



Sean with bikes in container no. 2



John and Dave - ready to load



Lang , Bev and Graham - waiting to load



No. 6 with the owner - last bike to load in container no. 1



Sean, John, Lang, Marcel, Graham and Robert - loading up



Brian, Robert, Lang and Warwick loading container no. 2



Group shot after last bike loaded!

Philip, Sean, Warwick, Graham, Brian, Stuart, Jim, Robert, Bev, Marcel, John, Lang

And so it was all over!

Without ceremony, after brief farewells, most people quietly slipped away to join flights, trains, buses for the journey home or to continue travelling.

What a trip!

The Group

Most of the group came from Australia and most were retired. Three members were in their early seventies.

Lang Kidby, Leader and organizer, Queensland Australia

Bev Kidby, Administrator and support vehicle driver

John Campbell, Queensland, Australia

Philip Barnaart, Australian Capital Territory

Paul Barnard, Newcastle, New South Wales

Jim Campbell, Queensland, Australia

Myles Elsing, California, USA

Dan Gridley, Queensland, Australia (rode Dave Griffith's bike for the first two weeks)

Dave Griffith, Queensland, Australia (rode for the last four weeks)

Robert Hazell, Hobart, Tasmania

Kevin Jones ("Hub"), Queensland, Australia

Marcel Mangelsdorf, Queensland, Australia

Graham Nugent, Queensland, Australia

Brian Reardon, Hobart, Tasmania

Sean Rooney, Queensland, Australia

Warwick Setttee, Queensland, Australia

Susan Horrobin, New Zealand

Ivan Dunn, New Zealand

Stuart Wood, Queensland, Australia

Martin White, Newcastle, New South Wales

Lee Harman, Washington State, USA

Sasha, mechanic, Bila Tserkva, Ukraine

Nadia, support, Bila Tserkva, Ukraine